

INEQE Safeguarding Audit

Chorister Annual Report 2024

Findings and recommendations from year
1 of the Independent Safeguarding Audit
Programme of the Church of England.

*For the purposes of this report, the term 'chorister'
refers to any choir member under the age of 18.*



Contents

Methodology	3
Introduction	4
Supervision & Safeguarding Responsibilities	5
Good Practice	6
Communication & Information Sharing	7
Scheduling & Wellbeing	8
Physical Safety & Environment	9
Policies & Risk Management	11

Methodology

The INEQE Independent Safeguarding Audit Programme undertook audits of 10 Church of England cathedrals in the year 2024. A focus area for the review is the safeguarding arrangements surrounding choirs operating from cathedrals. A range of documentation involving chorister safeguarding arrangements was submitted prior to the Audit's site visit, where the team undertook discussions with **120 choristers and other junior choir members, 29 chorister parents, and 16 staff from connected schools**. Numerous discussions with cathedral chorister staff were also undertaken. In addition, site visit tours and observations took place to provide a clearer understanding of the environment in which choristers operate from.



Introduction

In the 2024 audited cathedrals, a strong commitment to safeguarding choristers was evident. In the majority of cases, safeguarding responsibilities were well understood and supported by the correct policies, procedures, and oversight. The Audit identified numerous areas of strength, which consistently included innovative approaches toward safeguarding as well as a clear drive by staff to improve the care and protection of choristers.

That said, the Audit identified discrepancies in approach. While the variety of chorister surroundings and recruitment models necessitates a level of contextual safeguarding, much of this work could be streamlined by implementing a set of standards that each cathedral should adhere to. This was particularly relevant to the management of the chorister schedule and its impact on their wellbeing. Although good practice was observed in abundance, there is a significant opportunity for these approaches to be shared more widely so that all choristers can benefit from consistent and effective safeguarding measures.

To this end, the Audit believe that a set of chorister specific safeguarding standards or principles should be developed for the Cathedral to align with. The remainder of this report will outline key areas of strengths and opportunities for improvement that should be used as the benchmark for implementing the following recommendation.

Recommendation: The NST should, in collaboration with Cathedral safeguarding and chorister staff, develop a set of standards or guidelines to support the safeguarding arrangements surrounding choristers. This should not adopt a 'one size fits all' approach but instead outline key safeguarding principles that should form standard practice across all cathedrals. The standards should include, but not be limited to, the following areas:

- I. **Supervision & Safeguarding Responsibilities** – Addressing chaperoning, oversight, and the management of responsibilities between those involved in chorister care.
- II. **Communication & Information Sharing** – Establishing clear processes for how safeguarding-related information is documented and shared.
- III. **Scheduling & Wellbeing** – Balancing tradition, chorister wellbeing and scheduling demands, particularly during busy periods.
- IV. **Physical Safety & Environment** – Implementing preventative measures to enhance choristers' physical safety.
- V. **Policies & Risk Management** – Providing templated checklists and guidance for formal procedures to manage safeguarding risks.

Supervision & Safeguarding Responsibilities

Chorister supervision and safeguarding responsibilities are generally well established and understood. Across different recruitment models, it is widely recognised that cathedral staff oversee choristers within the cathedral, while school staff take responsibility during school hours. The most effective practices were observed where clear guidelines, such as Memoranda of Understanding between the school and cathedral or specific sections within chorister safeguarding policies, outlined responsibilities in detail. These documents clearly specified the times, locations, and circumstances under which each body was accountable. Such clarity, reinforced through communication with parents, choristers, and cathedral music staff, provided accountability and minimised ambiguity that could lead to potential issues. Chaperones often played a vital role as an additional layer of support, ensuring appropriate adult-to-child ratios during services and events. This arrangement allows key staff to focus on their musical duties while ensuring chaperones can be responsive to choristers who feel unwell or to discourage inappropriate behaviour from visitors, such as unauthorised photography.

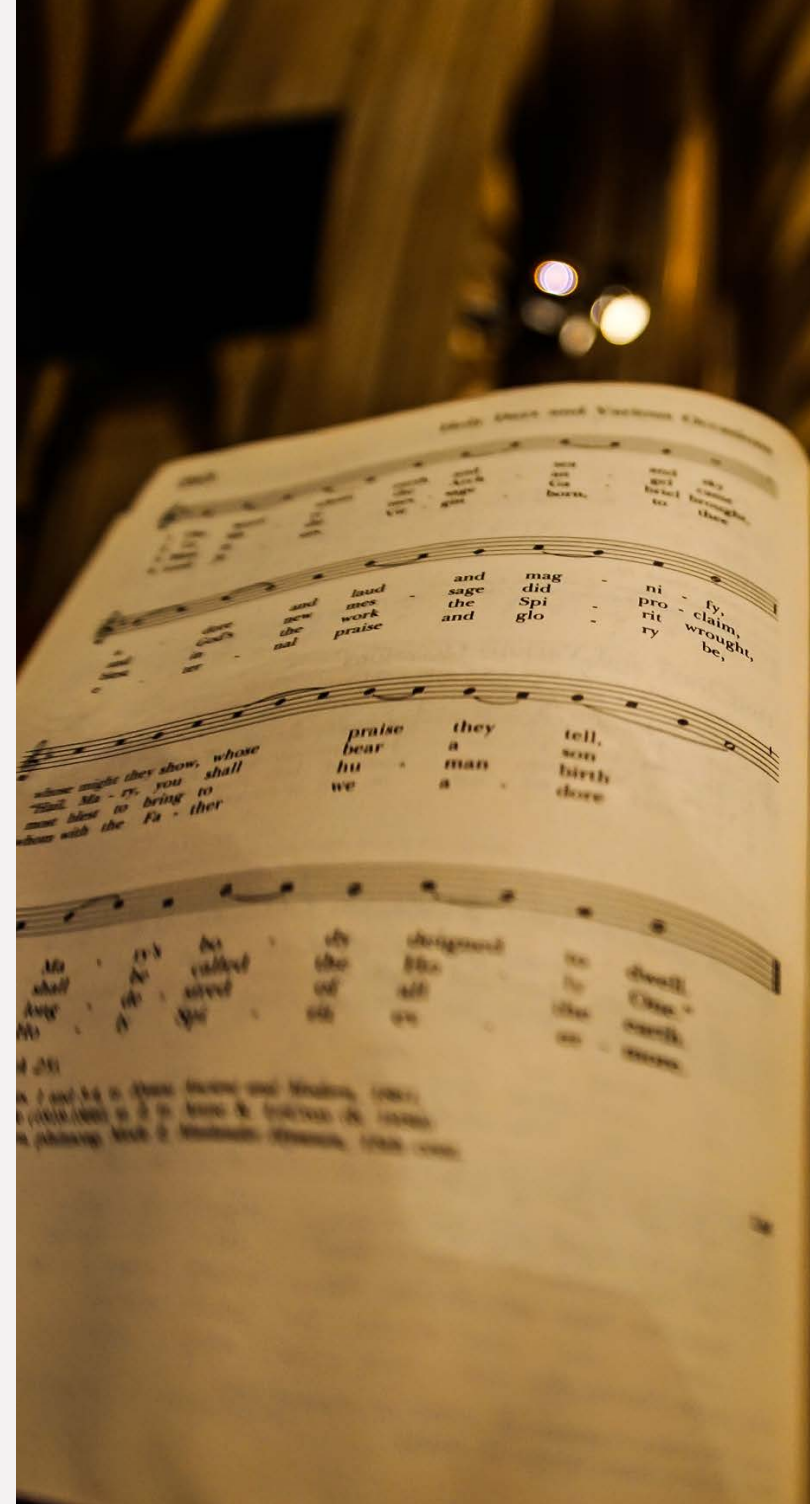


Good Practice

Good practice was further evidenced in transport arrangements. Where transport or chaperoning are provided for choristers on their journey to and from the cathedral, drivers are enhanced DBS checked but children are still not left alone in vehicles. Similarly, drop-off and collection procedures benefited from systems like ChurchSuite, which centralises attendance and safeguarding information. Measures such as signing children in and out and where a parent informs staff that it will be someone different picking up the child, a frequently updated safeguarding password is used to ensure their identity.

However, gaps were identified in some chaperones' ability to confidently manage behaviour, as they often relied on senior staff to intervene. A lack of clarity regarding their role, indecision, or insufficient knowledge and confidence to address behavioural issues can present a safeguarding risk. As key members of the supervision team, chaperones should be able to act decisively and effectively when necessary.

Recommendation: The Audit recommends that all staff working with choristers undergo behaviour management training, including strategies to address additional needs. This will ideally be carried out in collaboration with local or connected schools to create a unified approach. Additionally, clarity regarding roles and responsibilities should extend to choristers and their parents to create a fully supported environment.



Communication & Information Sharing

Good communication with parents was evident in many cathedrals. Dedicated and monitored chorister phones or emails were used to allow for quick and transparent exchanges. Where relationships with parents were particularly strong, regular meetings took place and in some cases, parent representative groups were also established to create a more formal structure for sharing information and raising concerns.

The establishment of a low-level concerns log within the music department was a strong feature in many cathedrals. In the best examples, these logs were used to inform safeguarding meetings and were regularly reviewed by senior staff to identify patterns of behaviour that could signal a cause for concern. It was equally reassuring that in situations where individuals were both chorister parents and members of staff, consideration was taken to maintain the balance between safeguarding and privacy. That said, the use of these logs was found to be inconsistent across cathedrals.

Information sharing between cathedrals and schools was generally frequent and effective in models where schools were located on site, or near the cathedral. For recruitment models with less integrated relationships, the cathedrals and schools were aware of who to contact when communicating critical and/or urgent information. However, cathedrals should consider how best to facilitate the flow of key information about choristers that could help to identify patterns of behaviour that may require attention.

Recommendation: Cathedrals should ensure that the process of logging low-level concerns is routine and consistent, with regular reviews to identify patterns and share relevant information with appropriate staff and connected schools.

Scheduling & Wellbeing

Many cathedrals have achieved a positive balance between a chorister's commitment to the choir and their overall wellbeing. This is often due to strong collaboration between cathedral staff and schools, as well as a 'safeguarding first' approach to scheduling, particularly during high pressure periods such as Christmas and Easter.

However, inconsistencies in this area were evident across cathedrals. Without proper scheduling that considers their broader responsibilities, choristers are at risk of burnout, potentially impacting their health and overall development, as noted by the Audit in some cathedrals.

In some instances, both parents and choristers expressed feeling unable to take time off when the demands became overwhelming. However, the Audit also found examples where music staff proactively address burnout with parents and choristers, encourage rest when needed and prioritise choristers' health over attendance.

It is important to recognise that while being a chorister is a significant commitment, it is only one aspect of a child's life. Balancing their musical contributions with academic and social responsibilities should not be unequally distributed among Cathedrals. This is particularly crucial during the most demanding times of the year. Choir services

at these times, while important for the Cathedral's tradition and income, should not come at the expense of the children's health and happiness.

While government child employment and performance laws do not specifically cover choristership, they provide a useful framework for working hours. The Church of England has the opportunity to set an example of good practice in this field by establishing its own set of wellbeing parameters that take into account the full demands placed on choristers, without detracting from the rich traditions of Cathedral choirs.

Recommendation: The NST should develop and implement national guidelines for chorister scheduling and wellbeing. These guidelines should provide clear parameters on the number of hours children can be expected to commit to chorister duties, particularly during peak periods such as Christmas and Easter, ensuring that adequate rest periods are factored into the schedule. The guidelines should take heed of UK child employment laws and child performance and activities licensing in England.

Physical Safety & Environment

Creating a safe environment for choristers was found to be a priority for staff, with a range of measures in place across each cathedral to support this. In the majority of audited cathedrals this year, choristers had access to dedicated toilet facilities during rehearsals and services. Where such facilities were unavailable, alternative arrangements ensured that choristers could use the toilets without the presence of staff or members of the public.

Photography was also managed well by staff and was a notable strength in all audited cathedrals. Choristers, dressed in traditional robes and performing in the cathedral environment, naturally attract the attention of visitors who may wish to take photographs. While there is a healthy understanding among choristers, parents, and staff that this can happen, staff rightly continue to enforce deterrents to protect the choristers as much as possible. A strong example was observed where an announcement was made as the choristers enter the building that requests visitors to refrain from taking photographs.

The Audit saw good practice surrounding the use of CCTV, safeguarding arrangements for trips and events and child-friendly safeguarding signposting. That said, reoccurring themes for improvement in these three areas highlight the need for specific recommendations and their inclusion in the aforementioned safeguarding standards.

The presence of CCTV in chorister areas was observed in some cathedrals and was commended for acting as both a deterrent and a safety measure against inappropriate behaviour. The use of CCTV in enclosed spaces, such as the organ loft, has faced some resistance. However, the Audit firmly supports this measure as an effective way to mitigate risks, especially in private spaces where risks of abuse have historically been a concern. It is important to adopt the mindset that 'it can happen here', even in environments built on trust.

Recommendation: Cathedrals should review their use of CCTV in chorister areas to prevent and respond to inappropriate behaviour. This should include, but not be limited to, enclosed spaces such as the organ loft.

Staff-to-chorister ratios were consistently upheld during trips and events outside the cathedral, with many associated schools taking a leading role in supervision or collaborating closely with cathedral staff in risk assessments and trip planning. However, the Audit found that choristers were often unaware or not provided with a contact number in case they became lost or

separated from their group. In today's digital age, ensuring access to a contact number is crucial. For those without mobile devices, a physical contact number on a lanyard or similar item would enhance their safety and should be incorporated into missing child or safeguarding policies.

Recommendation: Cathedrals should include provisions for contact numbers in their policies and procedures for trips and events to mitigate risks associated with missing or lost children.

Many cathedrals utilised safeguarding signposting across a variety of areas. However, the Audit found that while some visuals were used, an opportunity was missed to provide specific, child-friendly safeguarding messaging in key chorister areas. Although seemingly insignificant, it can be a helpful and constant reminder to a young person about how they can seek help and from whom. The best scenarios included those who had involved the choristers or other young people in the creation of these posters.

Recommendation: Cathedrals should display child-friendly safeguarding signposting in key chorister areas, such as song rooms/schools, and the back of toilet doors. Where possible, this should be developed collaboratively with young people.



Policies & Risk Management

Many music departments have developed chorister handbooks or policies aligned with the cathedral's overarching safeguarding policies. These documents have proven effective in addressing chorister-specific safeguarding arrangements while also serving as accessible resources for parents and others engaging with choristers.

Notable strengths were observed in cathedrals that collaborated with their associated school(s) to undertake additional safeguarding training and integrate the learning into their policies. This training was often more closely aligned with the daily duties of managing choristers and helped strengthen the relationship between cathedrals and schools. In the most effective examples, school sanction and reward procedures were mirrored within the Cathedral's policies, ensuring a cohesive and consistent approach to managing behaviour.

Additional good practice was noted in cases where roles and responsibilities were clearly outlined in a digestible format, providing reassurance to parents about the specific roles of each adult involved with their child. The Audit found a clear link between this transparency, and children and parent's reports of feeling safe and supported.

In the digital age, where young people face increased online risks, cathedrals with online safety policies or provisions within their chorister policies stood out. Particularly commendable were those cathedrals offering online safety training for choristers, their parents, and staff, especially where digital devices are issued for choir use.



Contact Us



+44 (0) 2890 232 060



ineqe.com/churchofengland

Read the individual and annual Independent Safeguarding Audit Reports on [our website](#).

